

Hear this news release that goes along with our 40 days of prayer:

“Latest news reports are that five terrorist cell groups have been operating in many of our churches. They have been identified as: Bin Sleepin, Bin Arguin, Bin Fightin, Bin Complainin, and Bin Missin. Their leader, Lucifer Bin Workin, trained these groups to destroy the Body of Christ. The plan is to come into the church disguised as Christians and to work within the church to discourage, disrupt, and destroy. However, there have been reports of a sixth group. A tiny cell known by the name Bin Prayin is actually the only effective counter terrorism force in the church.”

Jesus puts before us a story of three friends: a friend in need, a friend with bread and a friend in the middle. It’s clear from the story that he sees you and me—his followers—as the friend in the middle.

The friend in need shows up in the middle of the night, knocking at the door. In the first century there were no “Motel 6’s” “Best Westerns” or “Holiday Inn Express.” People stayed with friends or acquaintances wherever they could find them. It wasn’t unusual for people to travel in the cool of the evenings, especially in the summer. People baked bread every day and generally ate what they baked by the end of the day so that many households commonly had no provisions in the night. Being able to show hospitality to visitors was a major social concern—for one expected to be treated in the same way if you had to travel to another town for trade. It was not only a matter of community pride but a matter of self-interest to care properly for visitors. Not to be able to offer them a welcome was a great shame to the host as well as the entire village. The entire trade economy depended on providing hospitality for visitors.

We do not face these same conditions today. But we do live in a very needy world. Census figures show we are living in a county with a poverty rate of 10.1%. We are living in a world where 2.8 billion people live on \$2 a day or less. In Rio Bravo, the average family lives on \$15,000 a year. 52,000 families a year in Michigan struggle with cancer. Last year there were 7,264 divorces reported in Oakland County. Michigan has 13,000 children in foster care. In the Huron Valley school district alone there are 46,000 people who don’t go to church anywhere and as far as we know are bereft of faith in Christ. We are surrounded by the impoverished, the lonely, the divorced, the grieving, the

mentally impaired and the broken. We can't meet their needs. There isn't enough money or time or talents among us to even begin to help. It's like receiving a teaspoon and being assigned to bail out a flooded basement, or getting a squirt gun and being sent to put out the fire at the auto parts place this week. The needs of the modern world are overwhelming and we can't even begin to meet them. The friend in need might just be a family next door to you.

Let's consider the friend with bread. In a small village, everybody knew everybody's business. It's sort of like Highland—if you sneeze in Milford, they'll say “God bless you” down at Highland house bait shop. If someone had baked bread late in the day—everybody would know it. Families of 10-12 people would sleep in small one-room houses at night not much bigger than the average bedroom say 9' x 9'. In such a crowd, unlocking and opening the door meant waking up and displacing those 10-12 children and adults who may even have to go outside to allow you to open up the places where bread and supplies would be stored. The level of inconvenience would be on par with your neighbor coming over at midnight in July to borrow all of your Christmas decorations because they wanted to show them to some friends visiting from Cambodia. I think we can all understand the inconvenience to and reluctance of this friend with bread.

But we have a Heavenly Father who has an unlimited supply of bread. There is nothing he can not do. There is no need he can not fill. He caused a virgin birth. He fed 5000 people on 5 loaves of pita bread and a can of sardines. He called a man out of the grave. All things are possible with God. Even better, our Heavenly Father makes a stark contrast to the earthly man with bread in this story. God is never inconvenienced, reluctant or bothered by our requests. He is not only able to supply us good gifts but he is eager to do so. God is a whole warehouse full of needful things and is open 24/7. The lights are always on. God is always by the prayer phone, God has no shipping fees and he delivers! He is enthusiastically waiting for us to ask. This understanding of God is fundamental to prayer.

This brings us to the third friend in this story, the friend in the middle. He is the go-between, the intercessor between the friend-in-need and the friend-with-bread. Jesus wants us to see ourselves in this part of the story.

The intercessor is compelled by the need that he sees in the world. His heart constrains him to intervene. Pray for a heart like that!

The intercessor has a sure and certain confidence that God responds to prayer and will always deliver on his promises and act in his character. Pray for a faith like that!

The intercessor is bold and persistent. Life is full of obstacles and challenges and we are often tempted to give up. When I was a boy we prayed for peace between the United States and the Soviet Union. We prayed for freedom for all of those who toiled behind what we called the “Iron Curtain.” Many people despaired and promoted the idea that the rivalry between East and West was permanent and we should all learn to accept it. But how wrong the voices of despair were! The world is a completely different place!

A good friend grew up to regular beatings from his alcoholic father. When he was 16, he saw his dad attacking his mom and struck him back hard. Then he called the police and they threw his father in the Houghton County jail. He then left home and never looked back. Meanwhile their friends at Grace United Methodist Church prayed. Years later he returned to his home town and was shocked to discover his father and mother back together again. His father had gotten on his knees in that jail cell and surrendered himself to Christ. He became a leader in the local AA meetings. His life had completely changed. There is no human sorrow God cannot provide for. Jesus is teaching us to persist in prayer for years if necessary in order to see results.

James 5:16 says “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” When we pray for others, something always happens. It may not be what we anticipated or planned but God will respond. There are many people who are needy and can not pray for themselves. May be they don’t have faith in Christ; may be no one has ever taught them to pray; may be because they are overwhelmed with sorrow or fear. Can you hear them knocking on the door of your heart? Are you willing to be that friend in the middle for them, boldly going to your heavenly Father to intercede for them? Do you have people knocking on the door of your heart? Can you hear them?

At the end of the day, a church like ours can never change a community like ours. But a God like ours can. And he will, when we get our knees and ask, seek and knock. All we need to do is to be that friend in the middle and the blessings will fall like rain.